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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), recently returned from a Navy Reserve tour of duty in Afghanistan, said Monday that NATO commanders are crafting a plan for deploying badly needed additional troops against resurgent Taliban militants, but that European countries are waiting for direct phone calls from President-elect Barack Obama.

"What I sensed was that there is a great desire for a personal request from President Obama, and then they're in," Kirk said in a meeting with Tribune editors. "But they also expect [their troops] to flow in with a U.S. commitment [of additional American troops]."

As part of his three-week mission in December, Kirk worked on developing a new counternarcotics policy for NATO's Southern Command, which operates in Afghanistan. The country produces 90 percent of the world's opium, the main ingredient in heroin.

While there, he spoke with senior generals from Britain, the Netherlands and Canada. He said those countries' troops are carrying out the heaviest fighting in Afghanistan, rather than where most U.S. troops are, operating along the eastern border with Pakistan.

While the British and Dutch military were committed to stay, he said, the Canadians are under pressure to pull out because their military has suffered relatively high losses. But he believes that a request from Obama could persuade the Canadian parliament to keep the troops there.

Over the past four years, the Taliban has taken root in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan as the U.S. focused its anti-narcotics and military efforts largely on the eastern border.

"The drug trade is the main source of funding for the Taliban, and that's why they control that region," he said later in a telephone interview. "They've morphed into narco-Taliban, and they have access to hundreds of millions of dollars [from] drug trafficking."

To kill the insurgents' economic engine, poppy fields along the Helmand River need to be eradicated and additional troops sent to Helmand province, he said. "The Taliban will have to fight ... they can't allow it to happen," he said.

During his campaign, Obama called for sending 20,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan. NATO commanders hope to flush the Taliban out of Helmand by deploying 15,000 U.S. Marines and up to 10,000 British Royal Marines there.

He said President Hamid Karzai is not favored to win the presidential election this year. Karzai enjoyed enormous support from the West when he was elected in 2004, but his performance has since come under criticism.

He also said Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban before the regime was ousted, is believed to be living near the Pakistani city of Quetta with his mother, unreachable because of his "cozy relationship" with Pakistan intelligence agents.

This article was edited to comply with Franking Commission guidelines.